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***Children are more likely to succeed in school and in life if they have high-quality care and education during the first years of their lives. Society as a whole benefits as well. According to a 1999 RAND study, “Every \$1 invested in early childhood development programs saves \$7 in remedial education, welfare and incarceration.”***

***Governor Mark Warner is committed to a comprehensive effort to ensure that children start school healthy and ready to learn. The Governor’s initiative will focus on supporting early care and education programs, helping parents prepare children for school, making sure the health and nutrition needs of children are being met, and ensuring that we use our funding effectively.***

### **Family Support**

In order to help all Virginia parents give their children the best possible start in life, the Governor’s initiative will provide important support for families with new babies and small children. The Governor’s initiative includes:

- ✦ Distributing New Parent Tool Kits that include clear, easy-to-understand information about early childhood development. The kits feature a new resource — a toll-free telephone line (1-866-KIDS TLC) that will link parents to child care, health insurance, health and other community resources, and parenting support.

A total of 110,000 kits, available in both English and Spanish, will be available for distribution to new parents all across Virginia in the coming year. The kits were made possible through a public-private funding partnership.

- ✦ Launching an aggressive public awareness campaign next year to educate parents about the importance of early learning and quality care to a child’s healthy growth and development. Our plan is to involve the media,

retailers, and others in a broad-based education campaign that promotes the benefits of reading and quality child care in children from birth to age 5.

- ✦ Continuing the Governor’s successful effort to increase enrollment in the Family Access to Medical Insurance Security (FAMIS) plan, while focusing on efforts to promote good nutrition, health screenings, and immunizations for children; and to reduce the occurrence of childhood obesity and asthma.

### **Competitive Grants for Public-Private Partnerships**

Local communities are on the front lines in providing much-needed services and resources for Virginia’s children. These resources come from a variety of private, faith-based and government sources, and often it can be confusing for parents to understand where to get the best information and help they need for their children.

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# Education for a Lifetime

Recognizing that more government involvement is not the solution, the Governor's initiative involves the public and private sectors collaborating to help Virginia's children succeed. The Governor's initiative will provide grants to community-based organizations that can demonstrate an ability to bring together people and organizations on a local or regional level to create a comprehensive system of early care and education for young children. Five grantees will be selected to serve as pilot areas for creation and implementation of these public-private partnerships. Each area selected as a pilot will receive a maximum of \$500,000 with a local match requirement.

It is through these partnerships at the local and regional levels that high-quality early care and education systems will be achieved and sustained. Currently, there are a variety of different services and resources available at the local level, but it is often difficult for parents to navigate and access these resources. By creating local and regional partnerships, the Governor's initiative will provide a coordinated, cost-efficient means for parents to access a comprehensive system of early care and education.

## School Readiness

Children will perform better in school when those caring for them are qualified and well trained. To that end, Governor Warner is committed to ensuring the proper level of training and support for Virginia child care providers – standards that will have a dramatic impact on the quality of care and education in child care centers.

Virginia's current standards for child care centers rank in the bottom half of states in their required level of staff training and education qualifications for those directing a center and in the staff-to-children ratios for two-year-old children. Unlike the majority of states, the current standards have no limits on the size of the classroom. The current standards also fall short of the recommended guidelines from the

American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Public Health Association, and the National Resource Center for Health and Safety in Child Care. The Governor's initiative will move Virginia closer to the recommended guidelines, providing a higher quality of care for our children.

The Warner administration has been working with the Child Day-Care Council, child care providers, children's advocates, and other interested parties to come up with appropriate measures to strengthen our child care system in Virginia. The revised child day care center standards, which have been approved for public comment by the Child Day Care Council, include:

- ✦ Increasing education qualifications for individuals who are directing programs for children;
- ✦ Increasing certain staffing requirements so teachers/caregivers have more time for positive interaction with children;
- ✦ Establishing, for the first time, a maximum classroom size for children of preschool age or younger;
- ✦ Increasing the training for teachers/caregivers working with children to help them provide a safe and stimulating environment for children.

To assist providers in meeting more stringent training requirements, the Virginia Department of Social Services will double the number of training opportunities it provides from 20,000 annually to 40,000.

The Governor's initiative will be funded through a combination of existing resources and \$10 million in federal funds, which are available to increase the quality of care throughout the Commonwealth.

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